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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000090

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NI

SUBJECT: 10,000 ARMED CRIMINALS, NIGER DELTA APPROACHING CIVIL INSURRECTION

REF: A. LAGOS 64
 1B. LAGOS '06 1408
 1C. LAGOS '06 1419

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary. Secretary of Bayelsa State Government Dr. Godknows Igali believes that the release on bail of four jailed militant youths will result in the release of two Italian employees of Agip held hostage since December 7; kidnappers are willing to release the Lebanese hostage. Igali sees the Niger Delta on the brink of civil insurrection, with 10,000 armed youths engaged in criminal activity, organized in military-style camps. Igali called for a "post conflict"-style demobilization involving training and job placement for youths with support from the international community as the most effective way to resolve the crisis. Absent the political and economic commitment of the Government of Nigeria and the support of the international community, it is difficult to see how Igali's idealistic appeals to these youths can win out over the enticements of guns and ill-gotten gains offered by the arms dealer leadership of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). End Summary.

RELEASE OF FOUR MILITANTS MAY RESULT IN RELEASE OF ITALIANS

12. (C) Bayelsa Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Dr. Godknows Igali, told Deputy Director for West African Affairs Don Heflin the December 21 release of jailed militant Gani Adams, leader of the militant pan-Yoruba Oodua People's Congress, nearly derailed efforts to secure the release of two Italian Agip employees in captivity since December 7. (Ref B) Militants wanted to know why jailed leader Dokubo Asari was not released when Adams was, Igali said. One Italian had already been released on January 17. On January

25 the militants told Igali they would release the hostages if four jailed youths would be released on bail of naira 5 million (approximately USD 40,000). In his January 27 conversation with Heflin, Igali was confident the Italians would be released in early February. Igali said Agip has already lost naira 160 million (approximately USD 1.25 million) trying to secure the release of its employees.

¶3. (C) Igali said he has dedicated himself to ending Niger Delta militancy by the end of February. On the evening of January 18, Ijaw leaders, including retired army Generals and youth leaders from across the Delta met to develop a strategy to address the issue of growing unrest. They decided to go from camp to camp to talk to the youths and persuade them to put down their weapons. This effort will go on for an entire week. They will appeal to the freedom fighters and ask them to stand firm in rejecting criminal conduct. (Note: Igali reiterated his claim that the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is a loose organization of militant groups, of which Henry Okah (Ref C) functions as a kind of leader. End Note.) Okah is very difficult to deal with, Igali lamented, because he will not deviate from his decisions. However, Dr. Igali found it promising that the hostages' release is not strongly linked to demands for the release of the jailed former governor of Bayelsa State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha. He commented that the militants' willingness to exchange the Italians for four jailed youths instead of jailed militant leader Dokubo Asari or Alamieyeseigha suggests their interests are not ideological and that they may be susceptible to moral pressure.

NIGER DELTA STRUGGLE DETERIORATES

¶4. (C) Igali estimated there are 10,000 armed youths engaged
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in criminal activities in the Niger Delta, which is nearing a state of civil insurgency, Igali recently told President Obasanjo. Igali has been distressed when he sees AK 47s, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and hears talk of missiles and more complex weapons while in the creeks. Henry Okah, called "Master" by the youths, supplies the youths with weapons, Igali said. Okah claims to have 20,000 followers in camps throughout the Delta, although Igali thinks 10,000 is a more accurate number. The camps are run like the military and youths spend two weeks in and two weeks out of the camps.

This lifestyle is a way of passing time for these unemployed young men. Igali is deeply disturbed by this trend, and wonders when he steps into the camps whether Nigeria has already slipped into a state of civil war. Igali confided to us that youths have succeeded in capturing him on two separate occasions.

¶5. (C) Igali told Heflin that militant leader Alhaji Farah Dugogo and jailed militant leader Dokubo Asari both traveled to Libya where they were introduced to militant Islam. Both are driven by an interest in more equitable resource control.

Igali estimated Tom Polo, the leader of the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), has between two and three thousand armed youths at his camp. Other leaders playing prominent roles in the Delta in 2005-2006 are Commander Africa, Joshua McGuyver, and Prince Igido of Bayelsa State. (Ref A) Since 2005, Igali has noticed an upsurge in criminal groups which have no interest in resource control. Camps and phones of both the militants and criminal groups have been opened to Igali because he has gained the youths' trust. Igali believes his intervention has prevented several serious incidents.

POLITICAL & PRACTICAL RESPONSES FOR THE NIGER DELTA

¶6. (C) The release of jailed militant leader Dokubo Asari and former governor of Bayelsa State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, are two political issues which need to be

addressed before the Niger Delta problem can be resolved, Igali advised. Igali has asked President Obasanjo for Asari's release, hoping that it will ease tensions in the Delta. The Federal Government has asked to be presented with a letter listing three individuals willing to guarantee that Asari will not flee as a prerequisite to his release. Four prominent Ijaws from Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa states will sign the letter.

¶17. (C) The release of jailed former Bayelsa Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha would also help calm the situation, Igali said. Igali commented that Alamieyeseigha is sick, no longer has armed youths around him, and can no longer be considered a security threat. Therefore he could be released without danger to the GON, Igali reasoned. Alamieyeseigha still garners a lot of sympathy in Delta and Ondo states because of his Ijaw ethnicity and the role he has played in resolving disputes between Ijaws and other ethnic groups. According to Igali, if accepted abroad for medical treatment, Alamieyeseigha will return to Nigeria. Alamieyeseigha remains in contact with many governors and is friends with Vice President Atiku; as a result, Alamieyeseigha wants to stay outside the country until Obasanjo is out of office.

¶18. (C) Igali has organized Ijaw leaders, retired generals and activist youths who will visit the camps in early February to persuade youths they should be Ijaw "freedom fighters", not criminals, Igali said. The Niger Delta needs to be looked at as a "post-war" situation requiring a professionalized de-mobilization process. Mass training programs could provide the youths with skills. This would be in the interest of the international oil companies (IOCs). Igali suggested some youths could be employed in security companies while others could join the military. Igali said

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the Bayelsa State Government needs support in these efforts; the militants are becoming increasingly sophisticated, as evidenced by their successful attacks on oil rigs as much as 50 nautical miles from shore.

IGALI'S POLITICAL FUTURE AS YET UNDECIDED

¶19. (C) According to Igali, President Obasanjo asked him if he was interested in becoming governor, but told Igali he did not want to force him if he was unwilling. Igali commented that the political atmosphere in Bayelsa is tense, although everyone agrees the PDP gubernatorial candidate needs to be someone who both understands the Delta and can rally political support. PDP strength and his own name recognition mean Igali could run a short campaign.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Igali paints the most plausible picture we have of MEND: a loose association of groups organized in quasi-military camps and equipped with sophisticated weapons. Igali's post-conflict model for demobilizing the youths is a good one; it remains to be seen whether he can convince President Obasanjo to take the steps necessary to effectuate it. Absent political and economic commitment by the Government of Nigeria, and the support of the international community, it is hard to see how Igali's appeals to youth can win out over the enticements of guns and ill-gotten gains offered by the current situation. End Comment.

¶11. (U) AF/W Deputy Director Don Heflin cleared this cable.
BROWNE